

Fellowship of Christian Riders

Group Ride – Safety Tips and Signals

The most important “rule of the road” is to not overdrive your own capabilities. If at any time you do not feel that you can safely maintain the pace being set by the group, slow down to a pace that is suitable for your skills. Overdriving most often occurs when a rider tries to take curves too fast. If you find yourself having to overdrive to keep up with the group, position yourself toward the rear of the group and take the curves at a pace that is commensurate with your skills. You can catch up with the group (safely) on the straighter sections of road.

Always maintain an awareness of your surroundings and the road conditions. Don’t lock your eyes on the rider directly in front of you; instead, try to maintain an awareness of what is going on several bikes ahead. For instance, safely avoiding a pothole may not be possible if you don’t see it until after the bike in front of you has passed it. Watch what other riders ahead are doing and plan your moves accordingly. Watch for (and pass on to others behind you) hand signals from the other riders in front of you. Doing so provides time for everyone to safely react to changes in direction, speed and/or road hazards.

Under normal circumstances FCR group rides will use the “Staggered Riding Formation.” This is a fairly standard formation where riders form two columns so that both wheel tracks of a single lane of traffic are used but the riders are offset from each other (i.e. “staggered”) so they are not riding side by side. (See illustration below.) This allows the group to be as compact as possible while still maintaining a safe riding environment.

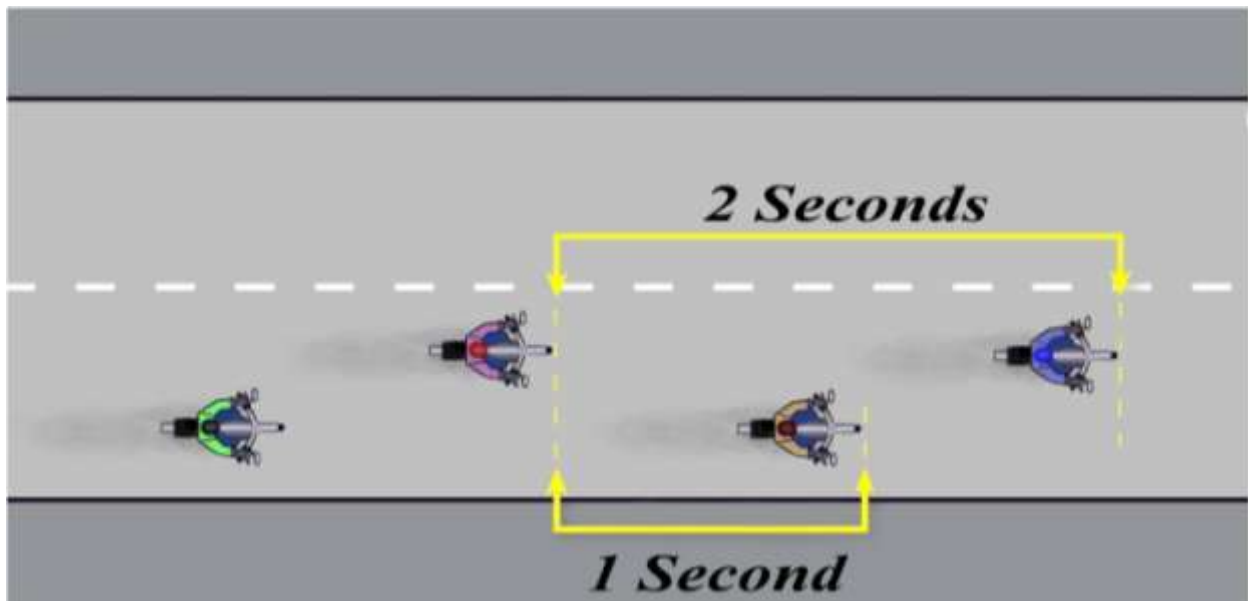


Figure 1

As illustrated in Figure 1, there is a “two second rule” that should be followed when riding in a staggered formation. Try to always maintain at least two seconds between you and the bike that is directly in front of you. This means that the actual distance between bikes will vary: as speed increases, the distance between you and the bike in front of you should also increase.

While the staggered formation is used most of the time, there are a few conditions when it is not preferred and we ride single-file. Conditions that might cause use of the single-file formation include: a narrow road where oncoming traffic might pose a hazard to riders in the column closest to the centerline; a very curvy road or curvy section of road; a road or section of road that contains numerous hazards (i.e. potholes or loose gravel); or any other occasion when the ride leader feels that a single file formation is needed to insure the safety of the other riders in the group. Whether in staggered or single-file formation, the two-second rule still applies. Always try to maintain two seconds between you and the rider directly in front of you. (If road conditions are less than desirable (i.e. unpaved or wet or poorly maintained roads) you should increase the distance even further than is called for by two second rule.)

Hand and arm (and leg) signals:

Two seconds isn't very long...especially on a motorcycle. When riding in a group, parts of the road ahead may be blocked by the presence of the motorcycles and riders in front of you. As a result, you may not be able see a road hazard or a sudden change in speed or direction. To compensate for this, group riders pass signals back through the group to let everyone know of upcoming changes or hazards. As the first rider to encounter the change (or hazard) the lead rider will normally be the one to initiate the signal.

However, anyone in the group can initiate a signal if they see a situation where giving it will increase the safety of those riding behind them. This is especially true of situations where the group slows down. For instance, the leader may roll out of the throttle a little and not issue a signal to slow down, but because of the “accordion effect” it becomes a sudden slow-down situation further back in the group. If you see this happening, give the riders behind you the signal to let them know you are slowing down. It's better to err on the side of giving too many signals than to cause an accident by not using them not enough.

Riding groups can develop and use any set of hand signals that they choose. However, there are several commonly accepted “standard” hand signals that most experienced riders are used to. FCR uses these commonly accepted hand signals. If you are interested, a more extensive compilation of common hand signals can be found on the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's website at www.msf-usa.org/downloads/Group_Ride.pdf. Their site also provides several good safety videos that can be accessed from their home page (www.msf-usa.org.) If you are a novice rider or are new to group riding, we recommend that you view their videos.

The next page shows the common hand and arm signals that FCR uses. Please learn them as you will see them frequently on our rides.



STOP or RAPID SLOW DOWN

(Left arm extended out to the left at a 45° down-angle OR left arm extended and moving in an up and down motion.)

If you see either one of these signals, roll off of the throttle and be prepared to slow down quickly. It's very important that you immediately pass this signal on to prevent any rear-end accidents behind you.



ROAD HAZARD

(If hazard is on the LEFT of the rider's path, point with left hand; if to the RIGHT, point with right foot (or point with right hand if you are uncomfortable using your foot.)

If you see this signal, look for the hazard and be prepared to take evasive action.



LEFT TURN AHEAD

(Left arm extended straight out.)

Approaching a left turn. Slow down to an appropriate speed and make the turn.



RIGHT TURN AHEAD

(Left arm extended and bent upward at a 90° angle.)

Approaching a right turn. Slow down to an appropriate speed and make the turn.



SINGLE FILE FORMATION

(Left hand touches helmet and then is extended vertically with index finger raised.)

Slow down enough to allow room for the riders in front of you to move into a single file, check your mirror to insure you are clear of the bike behind you and ease into position directly behind the bike in front of you.



DOUBLE FILE FORMATION

(Left hand touches helmet and then is extended vertically with two fingers raised.)

Smoothly move back into a double-file, staggered riding formation.

DON'T FORGET: Regardless of the riding formation, always try to maintain at least a two-second interval between yourself and the bike directly in front of you.